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Soviet technology speedup detailed in Pentagon report

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U.S. intelligence projects that a Soviet speedup of nuclear modernization, which became apparent to the U.S. military in the last year, will result in replacement of most of the Soviet land-based ICBM force over the next decade, the Pentagon reported yesterday. Such a move may possibly violate arms control agreements, the report said.

The fifth edition of Soviet Military Power, an annual Pentagon report, also emphasizes the important role pirated U.S. technology has played in the development of new Soviet weapons, particularly interceptor aircraft and cruise missiles.

The report underscores the Soviet lead in weapons for chemical warfare and those employing laser beams, which an official said achieved a limited operational capability against low-orbiting U.S. satellites in the last year. The report also notes Soviet advances in missile defense technology.

"By the mid-1990s, the Soviet

ICBM force will have been almost entirely replaced with new systems, a number of which may violate SALT II [1979 agreement] constraints," the Pentagon said in its new 156-page report.

"Based on current trends, our projections for the '90s give us no reason to feel that we can rest in our effort to prevent the Soviets from achieving a very significant, exploitable military advantage," Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said in a press conference introducing the new report.

A senior Pentagon official, who briefed reporters on condition he remain unidentified, said the two most significant Soviet developments in the last year were the deployment of 70 mobile single-warhead SS-25 ICBMs and the flight test of the new larger, 10-warhead SS-X-24 missile ('X' stands for experimental).

The senior official also said the Soviets are emphasizing Stealth technology, which makes weapons virtually invisible to radar by building them with non-metallic materials that do not reflect radar beams. He said the Soviets are believed to be developing ICBM warheads and cruise missiles using this technology. The United States has been thought to have a substantial lead in this area, with production of a Stealth fighter and development of a Stealth bomber.

The report said deployment of the first SS-X-24 could begin late this year. In addition, it said the Soviets are developing two, and possibly three, new land-based ICBMs.

A new missile to replace the 308 giant SS-18 10-warhead missiles, which it is estimated can destroy up

to 80 percent of the 1,000 deployed U.S. Minuteman missiles, is in advanced development and is nearing the flight-test stage, the report said.

Another missile "that may be larger than the SS-X-24 will begin flight testing in the next few years," the report said. Both of these missiles are likely to have greater accuracy and throw weight (the ability to hurl nuclear warheads from one continent to another) than their predecessors, the report said.

The report said "a third possible development" is a multiple-warhead version of the SS-25 that would be ready later this decade.

It noted that the Soviets already have deployed four Typhoon missile submarines, the world's largest sub, and probably have three or four additional vessels under construction. Each sub can launch 20 advanced SS-N-20 missiles, which have a range of 8,300 kilometers, the report said.

The Pentagon document also said a new ground-launched Soviet cruise missile, dubbed the SSC-X-4, "will probably become operational this year." Cruise missiles fly close to ground, unlike ballistic missiles that orbit through space to their targets.

The new cruise missile will be able to hit all the targets in Europe currently in reach of the SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missile, the senior official said.

He said the expected deployment of this missile may explain the recent Soviet willingness to negotiate away its currently deployed 441 SS-20s in exchange for the American Pershing II ballistic missiles and cruise missiles now being deployed in Europe.